Indifference to Suffering.

157 154 Indifference to suffering is popularly considered to be a universal Indian trait and is usually roundly condemned on moral and social grounds. The Kamarakotos show this (to us) rather unpleasing characteristic in considerable degree, but its basis is evident and it cannot be severely condemned if it is well understood. It seems anomalous that a tribe should be notably kind, mild, affectionate, and anxious not to inflict pain, and at the same time apparently apathetic toward the suffering of others, but the two traits are not really incompatible and are, indeed, largely different aspects of the same characteristic. They hate pain and, being sympathetic, dislike inflicting it. But sympathy means in fact (as the word does in origin) the sharing of feeling. To be sympathetic with a person in pain means in some measure to share the pain. The Kamarakotos tend to withdraw from pain, a perfectly normal psychological reaction, and the very fact that they are sympathetic makes them tend strongly to withdraw from a person in pain simply because it is painful for them not to withdraw. This, too, is a normal reaction, whether conscious or subconscious, and it is shared by most persons in our society. But in our society most of us carefully hide this reaction, partly in hypocrisy, because it is contrary to our social mores, and partly from the better motive of hoping to alleviate the pain of the sufferer. It is not contrary to Kamarakoto mores, more natural or, if you like, more primitive than ours, and according to their beliefs and knowledge, there is no good reason for attending to suffering because the ordinary person can do nothing to alleviate pain. If the pain is natural, nothing is possible but waiting for death or recovery. If it is supernatural, only a skilled piache can hope to remedy it. In either case withdrawal from the suffering person is not only perfectly proper but also the only sensible course, granting the Kamarakoto premises.

157 154 758 Despite this tendency toward withdrawal, the Kamarakotos certainly feel real sorrow for the suffering of anyone near to them and, within their own system, real consideration. The latter is well shown by the fact that when a person is ill they make every effort to do what little they believe can be done, notably to get a piache (or during our stay to persuade our doctor) to attend the victim. They do not sit by the bedside (hammock-side), prepare special food, soothe the fevered brow, and the like, because they see no benefit in these things, and they endeavor to continue their normal activities and to put the sufferer out of their minds as much as possible.

Children.

152 593 There is much and obvious personal affection and family pride. Kissing is unknown and casual embracing rare, but between husband and wife, or wives,